

ON  
**THE FEAR OF GOD**  
AND  
**THE KING,**  
**A SERMON,**

PREACHED AT AIR, ON OCCASION OF THE  
PUBLIC FAST, FEBRUARY 26, 1795,

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BY WILLIAM M'GILL, D. D.  
ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF AIR.

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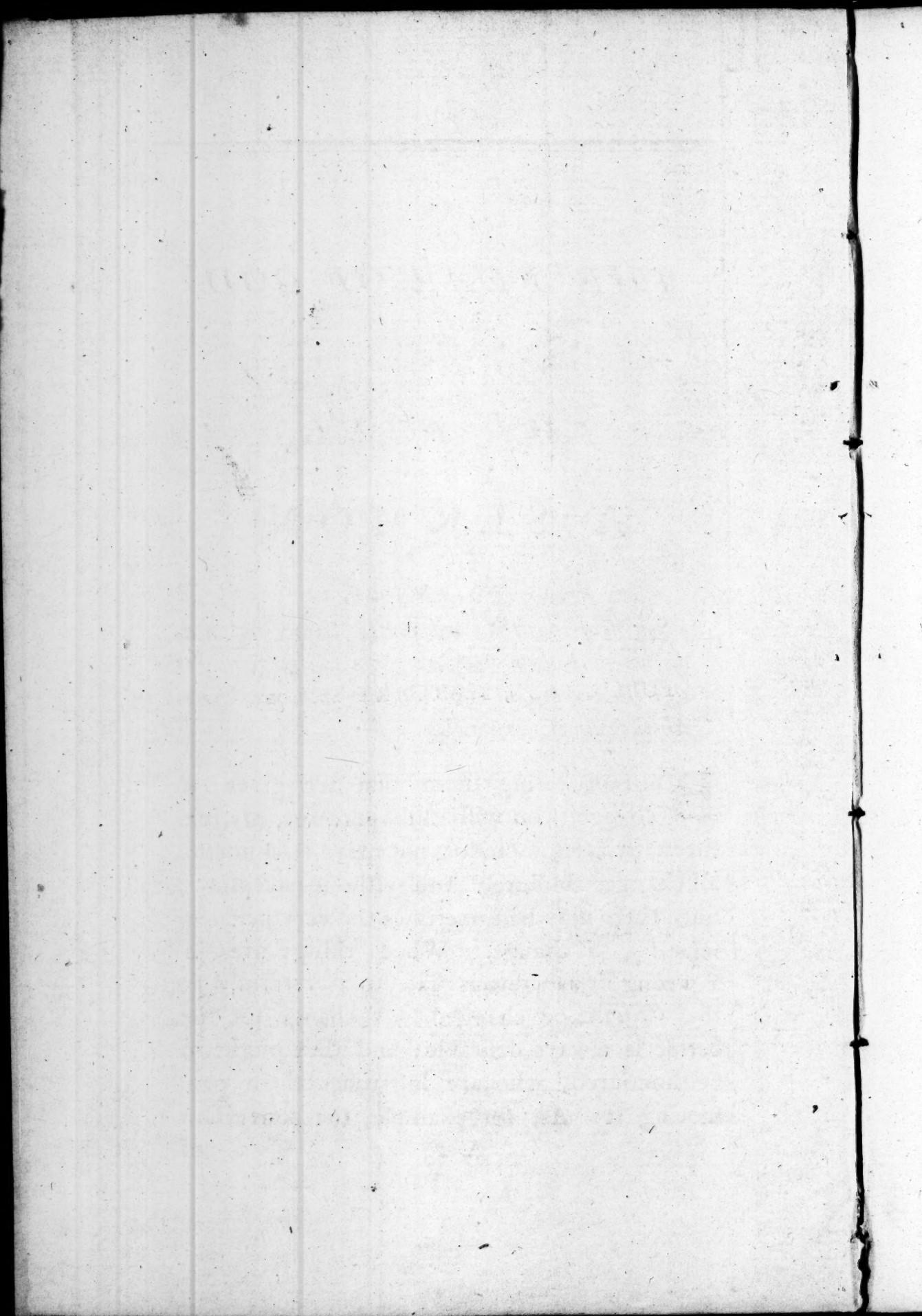
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1795.



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ON  
THE FEAR OF GOD

AND

THE KING,  
A SERMON,

From Prov. xxiv. 21, 22.

*My Son, fear thou the Lord and the King; and meddle not with them that are given to change: For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?*

**B**Y reprobating them that are given to change, you will easily perceive, my brethren, that Solomon does not mean to condemn all changes absolutely, and without exception; since there may be sometimes the very best reasons for a change. When things are in a wrong or dangerous state, it is certainly fit they should be changed. A change for the better is always desirable; and they ought to be honoured, who are instrumental in promoting it: As, for example, the conversion

of the heathen world from paganism to Christianity ; and of the Christian world, from Popery to Protestantism ; the conversion of a sinner from the error of his way ; or the change of a nation from Egyptian bondage and tyranny to a state of liberty and happiness ; these are blessed changes, and subjects of real joy and thankfulness. The change here forbidden to be fought after, is a change merely for its own sake, without any benefit gained thereby ; or rather a change from good to bad ; from the fear of God and the King, to a temper directly the reverse, whereby men reject or infringe their joint commands, or act contrary to the laws of religion and government, upon any pretence whatever. Such things may be done under plausible pretences—pretences of reform ; of liberty ; of zeal for the good of the People ; and for defending the rights of men, &c. And the plausibility of their pretences will make such innovators more able to seduce and mislead simple well disposed people, who are not aware of any bad designs. For which reason, there is the more need to warn such persons against associating with them, as Solomon does here : “ My Son, fear thou the Lord and the King ; “ and with them that do otherwise hold not “ thou commerce.” Such is the translation given by some, and very probably the right one.

Here

Here then, my brethren, is one of the most useful and important maxims contained in this book, or in the whole word of God ; injoining duties of the greatest moment, and directing the proper order of them—first to obey God, the Supreme and Universal Governor, and then to honour the King, as his vicegerent, and “ his minister to the people for good \*.” At the same time, we are given to understand, that these are duties of such great weight and necessity, that we must adhere to them inviolably, and have no familiar intercourse with those who neglect or infringe them ; because a dreadful punishment awaits such transgressors. “ For “ their calamity shall rise suddenly ; and who “ knoweth the ruin of them both.”

All that I propose, through divine assistance, in the following discourse, is only to offer a few remarks, first upon the duties here enjoined ; and next upon the sanction with which they are enforced ; and then to conclude with a brief application. These things will afford us instructions very suitable to the present times, and to the design of this day.

I. First, let us endeavour a little more particularly to explain the duties now before us.

\* Rom. xiii. 4.

The design of this proverb is to keep men in just subjection to the laws of God and their country, and to warn them of the dangerous consequences of a contrary behaviour. Our duty to God and the King is expressed here, as in several other places of scripture, in the same sentence, and as it were with the same breath, to teach us, that the King is a sort of image and representative of God on earth; and as the highest reverence and worship is for ever due to God, so there is a somewhat similar honour to be paid to the King, or the chief Magistrate of the nation, by whatever name he may be called. In like manner hath the Apostle Peter coupled these duties.—“ Fear God,” says he. “ Honour the King†.” Another thing which we learn from the sacred writers, so often uniting these precepts, is that there is a very close and intimate connection between the obedience we owe to God, and that which we owe to the King; and that no firm or steady allegiance can be maintained towards earthly Sovereigns, if the fear of God be laid aside. For though many persons serve and honour their Kings, who seem to be deficient in piety to God, or utterly destitute of it; yet it may be affirmed, that none but the truly religious are so rooted in the duty of civil subjection as that they cannot be moved away from it, either by the allure-

† 1 Pet. ii. 17.

ment

ment of riches and pleasures; or by the fear of sufferings; or even by the provocation of actual injuries. No other principle, exclusive of religion, is adequate to such a purpose; nor is there any reason to expect, that he who is false to his God, will prove faithful to his Prince. But if the fear of God hath taken deep root in men's minds, as it ought to do, it will, like a sacred anchor, hold them fast to the post of duty in the most turbulent times, and amid the greatest tempests of discord and sedition; because while they act upon this principle, they know and consider, that to resist lawful authority, is “to resist the ordinance of God ‡,” and to fight against God himself: So that in this instance, as well as others, religion is the best safe-guard of morality; and all human rulers, who would promote the peace and prosperity of the people they govern, ought with great care to promote and encourage among them the study of true religion. Those rulers who give countenance to impiety, and the contempt of religion, are not only enemies to their people's happiness; but they prepare axes and gibbets for the destruction of their own authority.

We must here observe, however, that God is placed before the King, because he is the first and highest object of our regard. The obedience

‡ Rom. xiii. 2.

which

which we owe to Kings, or earthly rulers, is not absolute and unlimited: it is bounded and circumscribed by the fear of God; and is neither to be demanded nor paid, any further than that higher principle allows. When the Apostles exhort children to obey their Parents, and Servants to obey their Masters, they always bid them pay this obedience “in the Lord,” that is, so far as it shall be agreeable to the commandments of Christ. The same limitation belongs no less to the obedience which we owe to Kings and Magistrates; they are only to be honoured and obeyed in the Lord, or consistently with the obligations of religion; which is likewise expressly taught by Solomon, in another place, where he says, “I counsel thee to keep the King’s commandment, and that in regard to the oath of God \*,” that is (as it is explained by learned interpreters, both Jewish and Christian) observe and obey the King’s commandment, with a due regard to the oath of God; or so as at the same time to preserve a good conscience, and by no means to violate the obligations you are under to keep the commandments of God. This is precisely what our Saviour teaches in the Gospel.—“ Render unto Cesar the things which are Cefars; and unto God the things that are Gods †.”

\* Eccl. viii. 2.

† Matth. xxii. 21.

Upon

Upon this principle, the Servants of King Saul are greatly to be commended for refusing to obey the unjust and cruel order of their Master, to slay in cold blood the poor defenceless Priests of Nob †, who had committed no crime; and Doeg the Edomite, who executed that order, can never be remembered without abhorrence and detestation: so also, when the Apostles Peter and John were brought before the Jewish Council, and commanded, with threats, to teach no more in the name of Jesus, they answered, “Whether it be right in the sight of God, to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye †.” After the same example, the early Christians were peaceable and faithful subjects, in all temporal matters, to their heathen rulers and persecutors; but when these rulers required them to renounce the Christian profession, to blaspheme the Lord Jesus, or to offer incense to heathen Gods, they firmly refused to obey such orders, and shewed themselves ready to endure any sufferings rather than comply with them. And with the utmost reason. For as it would be contrary to duty, and a subversion of all order, to obey the command of an inferior officer, in opposition to that of his superior, and of the King himself; so it would be no less unreasonable to

† 1 Sam. xxii. 17, 18.

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† Acts. iv. 19.

obey

obey the command of the King, when it contradicts the command of the King of Kings; or to follow our supreme rulers on earth, in opposition to the will of heaven.

But in general, in all Christian countries, the duties men owe to God and the King go hand in hand, and no man can violate the one, without departing from the other. Among us at least, it is certainly so. Indeed it is otherwise at present in France, where Christian worship in any shape, is hardly tolerated, by the pretended worshippers of reason and liberty; where all professions and appearances of religion are discouraged and even ridiculed by public authority; and where people are invited to open their shops, and carry on their worldly business, on the Lord's day, with a threatening sentence subjoined—that they shall be considered as disaffected to the Government, who "remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." In that miserable country, the commands of human authority stand in direct opposition to the laws of God; and if there are any remains of Christianity among them, the people must of necessity disobey their earthly masters. But blessed be God, a different order takes place in our happy land. We are called to no trials of that kind. We may strictly and conscientiously keep all the commandments

commandments of God, and at the same time be good and loyal subjects to our King. Nay I will go further, and affirm that want of loyalty, among us, is a sure proof of the want of religion. For what is it in this country that poisons loyalty, that engages men in seditious and treasonable practices, or in designs against the Government? Upon the most favourable construction, it is levity and love of change; or restlessness and discontent; or more probably pride and ambition, nourished by the hope (may it ever prove a vain and delusive hope!) that when the empire is shattered to pieces, they shall be able to choose their share of the fragments. Now we must be very ill instructed, not to know, that with such principles, true religion is altogether incompatible.

It is allowed indeed, as formerly hinted, that persons of real piety may, by the cunning of artful impostors, be seduced, at least for a while, upon this subject, and drawn aside from the path of duty: as we find that many of the people of Israel joined themselves to the party of Absalom, without any intention of revolting from the King his Father, till they were led forward by degrees, and involved unawares in open rebellion. For at the beginning of that revolt, we read that with Absalom there went out of Jerusalem, at

his call, two hundred men, " and they went in  
 " their simplicity, they knew not any thing †." They were entirely ignorant of the whole matter. And this is the reason of the affectionate paternal counsel given in my text, to have no commerce with such men ; which we render, not to meddle with them, not to mingle in their society, and to take no part in their councils. For as, in general, " evil communications corrupt good manners," and as a person will hardly escape intemperance, who frequents the company of intemperate people, so it will be difficult to associate often with disaffected and seditious persons, who seek to change or overturn the government of their country, without catching the infection of their pernicious principles. They will avow nothing but harmless and benevolent intentions; that their aim is to reform and improve, not to destroy; that they mean to correct abuses which have crept in by length of time; to restore government to its original purity; to procure an equal and perfect representation of the people; and to promote their ease, liberty, freedom from taxes, &c. : and thus under specious colours, carry on the most dangerous designs.

A true specimen of these seductive arts, we have in the case of Absalom above mentioned.

† 2 Sam. xv. 11.

" He

“ He rose up early, and stood beside the way of  
 “ the gate, where justice was administered ; and  
 “ it was so, that when any man that had a con-  
 “ troversy came to the King for judgement,  
 “ Absalom addressed himself to him ; and after  
 “ some kind inquiries about his family and  
 “ place of abode, he pretended to look into his  
 “ cause, and assured him it was good and right,  
 “ but regretted that there was no man deput-  
 “ ed of the King to hear him\*.” Then he  
 added, “ O that I were made judge in the  
 “ land, that every man who hath any suit, or  
 “ cause, might come to me, and I would do  
 “ him justice.” If we could take Absalom’s  
 word for it, he was one of the most zealous  
 and disinterested friends of the people. The  
 text subjoins, that “ when any man came  
 “ nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put  
 “ forth his hand, and took him and kissed him.”  
 And by continued assiduity in these practices, he  
 stole the hearts of the men of Israel, and raised  
 a dangerous rebellion against his Father’s crown  
 and life.

Nor is it any wonder, that men of simplicity  
 and uprightness have been sometimes taken in  
 by such professions, and engaged in measures  
 they little thought of. But it is not so easy  
 to devise an excuse for them, if they continue

to associate with these reformers, after they have thrown off the mask, and entered upon plans of manifest hostility against the government that protects them. There is nothing but desperate wickedness, or the most deplorable infatuation, that can account for such conduct. And thus much for the duties here enjoined, which Solomon presses upon us, with great earnestness and affection, to fear God and the King, and to have as little communication as possible, with those who do otherwise, or with " changers," as our margin has it. Let us now, if you please,

II. Consider a little the sanction with which these duties are enforced, or the punishment awarded to the violators of them. " For their " calamity shall rise suddenly ; and who know- " eth the ruin of them both."

The ruin that awaits restless, factious, turbulent and seditious spirits, and their associates, shall be sudden, violent, and grievous. It shall come upon them by surprise, and altogether unexpected, so that they shall not be able to take any measures to ward off the blow. Though they conduct their plots with the utmost art and secrecy, their mischievous designs shall not fail to be discovered, and the authors of them, and all

all that are concerned in them, brought to condign punishment, when they are least aware of it. As Solomon says elsewhere, “ An “ evil man seeketh only rebellion, therefore shall “ a cruel messenger be sent against him\*,” that is, a messenger that shall be deaf to his intreaties. But whereas in my text he speaks of “ the “ ruin of them both,” some make the word “ both,” to mean both the seditious and those who hold intercourse with them. Others understand it, to refer both to those who break the laws of God, and those who seek to overturn the Government of their Country. Others, lastly, take it to mean both “ God and “ the King,” and the evil threatened, to be what they inflict; as if he had said, who knoweth the time, or manner, or weight of that calamity which the united vengeance of God and the King will bring upon the contemners of their laws and their authority; or those who rise up in rebellion against them?

The last of these interpretations seems to be the most easy and natural, but all of them concur to assure us, of the dreadful and inevitable ruin which awaits the sinners spoken of; namely those who trample on the laws both of God and the King. They shall be liable to a severer punishment than other sinners. For

\* Prov. xvii. 11.

other sinners, many of them at least, may pass their days without suffering any animadversion from the laws of their country, and even without incurring any remarkable effects of the indignation of God. On the other hand, when men adhere to their duty to God, they have always the testimony of a good conscience to support them, though they should incur the displeasure of their Prince, and the unjust censure of their fellow citizens. A temporary and transient happiness may be enjoyed by those who, at the expence of their integrity and duty to God, cultivate the favour of their earthly Governors. But when men at once incur the displeasure of Almighty God, and become obnoxious to the Magistrate, or Governor, under whom they are put in subjection, what resource is left them, and how can they escape the most miserable destiny? Under this threat are comprehended all evils, both of the present life and of that which is to come.

1st. The displeasure of Almighty God is a dreadful and intolerable burden. Who may abide his indignation, or stand when once he is angry? It is impossible for men either to elude his knowledge or to resist his power; nor can death itself put them out of the reach of his vengeance. "It is a fearful thing to fall into

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"the hands of the living God." He has all nature at his command, and can employ any part of it that he sees fit, to execute his awful purposes. He called for the waters of the sea, to drown the sinners of the old world; he rained fire and brimstone from heaven, on Sodom and Gomorrah; he made the earth open its mouth, and swallow up quick those that perished in the gainsaying of Cora; and overthrew the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, by various calamities—as by pestilential disorders; by the biting of fiery serpents; by the sword of foreign enemies; and sometimes by the sword of one another. And after their settlement in the land of Canaan, as often as they revolted from God, they were forsaken by him, sold into slavery to their heathen neighbours, and delivered up to a variety of wretchedness. These things are recorded for our admonition, and are examples and warnings to us.

Guilty nations who cast off the fear of God, and cannot be brought to timely repentance, are punished with various calamities in this world, according to the measure of their guilt. The distribution of proper punishments and rewards to particular persons is chiefly reserved to a future state of retribution: though in part it takes place in this pre-

sent life, especially when to their neglect or violation of the laws of God, they add,

2. Disloyalty to their King, and the transgression of the laws of their country. The greatest injury which any man can do to his country, is to endeavour to subvert the constitution and government of it, though it have imperfections, as all human governments must have; when he is not sure of being able, without much bloodshed, or even with it, to put any thing better, or so good, in its place. Nor is the injury less, though he should pretend to have, and have in reality, the most generous and benevolent intentions of improving the government of the country, and carrying it to a higher state of perfection. But every one attempts to overturn the government of his country, who seeks to bring about any change in it, by force and violence; by intimidating the legislature; or obstructing the executive power; or superseding, in any degree, the regular constituted authorities. Every person who engages in such designs falls under the censure of the Apostle, "He resisteth the ordinance of God, and shall receive to himself damnation \*," or "judgement." That is, he becomes liable to the punishment of a traitor. That attempts of this kind

\* Rom xiii. 2.

have

have of late been made against our government, there are not wanting melancholy proofs. Attempts (surprising and incredible as it may appear) to change the best form of government upon earth, into a wretched imitation of the worst! If all who were engaged in these attempts have not suffered so much as they deserved, it is a proof of the mildness of our laws. If some have suffered, we have reason to be thankful for it, because it was necessary for the safety of the state, which might otherwise have been plunged into great miseries. We may, however, assure ourselves, that the justice of heaven and earth will unite, to bring deserved and inevitable ruin on those, who, casting off the fear of God, and of the rulers that he hath set over them, endeavour to alter or overthrow the government of their country. And ought not these considerations to have some weight in persuading even those who are not much under the influence of religious principle, to mind this exhortation, which speaketh unto us as to children “ My son, fear thou the Lord “ and the King,” &c. To which we might add many exhortations of like import, and of still higher authority, in the New Testament; where Christians are exhorted to yield submis-

sion in all lawful things, to institutions and rulers, much less friendly to liberty than ours.

Let us now come to the application of the subject :

We are this day called together by public authority, to confess and forsake our sins, that we may obtain the pardon of them, and avert, if possible, the awful displeasure of Almighty God, and procure his protection to our country against the dangers that threaten it. How much soever we may be disposed each of us, as it commonly happens, to justify ourselves, we can hardly fail to be persuaded, upon a little reflection, "that the Lord hath a "controversy with the inhabitants of our "land \*," and that it is not for nothing we have been left to struggle, for more than two years, at a vast expence of blood and treasure, with the calamities of an unsuccessful war, of which we do not yet see any end, in defence of the most valuable privileges which belong to us as men and Christians. To say that we need not have engaged in this war, or that we may bring it to a period whenever we please, is speaking at random, and taking the liberty to say that for which we have no authority; and of which, for want

\* Hof. iv. 1.

of knowing all the circumstances, we are not competent judges. Rash and unfounded assertions may be easily made, but yield no benefit unless it be to expose the folly of those who make them. It will surely be much wiser for us on this day, to examine our ways, and consider whether we have not, by our sins, contributed to the national calamities, and particularly what our conduct has been, with regard to the two great articles now under our consideration—the religion and government of our country.

First for religion, If we feared God aright, we would be more attentive than many are, to honour the ordinances of his worship, and more united among ourselves, in supporting that mode of worship which our ancestors, about a hundred years ago, were so zealous, and so glad, to get established in this country. But, alas, while many in higher stations give no public testimony of their regard for this mode of religion, or any other; wherein they neither imitate the piety of their sovereign, nor set a good example before their inferiors; among the common people, many seem to make it consist chiefly in studying what ministers or preachers they will choose to hear; to what sect or party they will join themselves; where they will find religion properly modeled according

ing to their taste and fancies; and how they may secure their ears from hearing any thing, as the will of heaven, that does not agree with their own pre-conceived opinions! The main business of many, who make the greatest professions of religion, is not to bring up their sentiments and manners to the standard of the divine law, but to bring down the divine law to their own standard. They have also, in direct opposition to the will of God,\* shewn a strong disposition, especially of late, to step out of their own sphere, and to undertake the office of statesmen. And of so little importance, in their eyes, is that unity and concord which Christ so earnestly prayed for to his disciples †, that to divide, and separate, and scatter the flock of Christ, at least as far as their example and influence can go, seems to be with them a high point of religion, and an atonement for their sins.

Now, it may be well believed that our religious divisions do not contribute to our political union, or to strengthen our hands against the common enemy. But it is truly wonderful, if some of the strictest religionists among us, as it is reported, are those, who of all others feel least alarm at the success of an enemy, that hath avowedly cast off all religion; nay, instead of

\* I Cor. vii. 24.

† John. xvii. 20.

being

being alarmed, are most favourably disposed towards him; and would be most ready to join his standard, if he should invade this country. For since, in respect of the arm of flesh, our enemies are far superior to us, our principal hope of bringing this war to a happy issue must be founded in the aid of heaven; which we humbly trust will be more readily afforded to us, than to our enemies—because we, as yet, preserve more reverence for the name and worship of God, and for the rules of piety and righteousness, than they. But what avails a religion which, instead of promoting union and concord, serves only as a subject of division, contention and hatred? Whereto serveth a faith, that is inactive, barren and dead; entirely destitute of those good works, which are the proper fruits of gospel faith? Or how can we be benefited by a “form of godliness, while we “deny the power thereof †?” We have been a people much more highly favoured, with religious and civil advantages, than our enemies; and therefore any abuse of them by us must be proportionally more offensive to God. And he hath often, in righteousness, employed the enemies of his name, as the rod in his hand, and the staff of his indignation, to chastise the

‡ a Tim. iii. 5.

**faults**

faults of his own people. On this subject then, we have just cause of humiliation and sorrow this day, that the chastisement of heaven towards us, may not be in vain.

Secondly, As to the other branch of duty—the fear of the King, or a due reverence and subjection to the Government of our country, we have great reason to be thankful, that no gross violations of that commandment have appeared among us of this place. But in other parts of the country, they have been manifest and flagrant. And if they had not been checked by some examples of punishment, no one can say to what height they would by this time have arrived, or how much innocent blood might have been shed by means of them. But if, notwithstanding the happiness of our Constitution, and the goodness and equity of our Government, a spirit of disaffection and sedition really exists among many in the nation, and is kept down only by the fear of punishment, there is always ground to be apprehensive of it, and on our guard against it. Indeed the chief encouragement which our inveterate enemies had to begin and carry on this war against us—I say to begin it, for it is a certain fact that they were the first to declare war against us, and they did so after having at their own hand, and without consulting

sulting the parties concerned, violated treaties which were of long standing, and which their nation, along with others, had pledged itself to maintain. So that the war seems to be purely offensive on their part; but on our part purely defensive, and therefore both just and necessary. But I repeat it, that the chief encouragement which they had to begin it was the hope of seeing us a divided people, and of being able to raise up among us a desperate faction, or factions, to espouse their interest, and to second their execrable designs. In which hope they were not a little flattered by the different societies in Britain, who at that time held correspondences with them. And accordingly, it may be remembered, that in the beginning of their hostilities, they declared forsooth, that they had no quarrel with the "people," of Great Britain, but only with their "King," that is, they meant, in great kindness to us, if you please, to rid us of our King; to destroy our constitution of government; and reduce us to the same misery that reigns in their country. If they had reason to think us all united as one man, and firmly determined to shed the last drop of our blood, rather than yield up any portion of our religion, of our laws, of our constitution of government, of our liberty and

D                      independence

independence to them ; they would probably lower their tone a little, and speak with less confidence of their being able to effect the ruin of the British empire.

Be this as it will, our present circumstances, as a nation, are undoubtedly very critical; and the times are probably not far off, when it will be brought to a decisive trial; what value we put on those civil and religious liberties, which we have the happiness to enjoy, and what we will do for preserving them, rather than yield them up for the honour of confraternity with a nation of bloodthirsty Atheists; or rather I should say, for the honour of subjection to the capricious tyranny, and insatiable avarice, of a set of democrates, lately sprung from the dust to Lord it over mankind; who, in their fond imaginations, have already swallowed up the wealth of the whole world, and put down all rule and authority but their own. Are there any here present ambitious of such honours? God forbid there should. But if we have no ambition of that kind, let us continue in the fear of God and the King, lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, and endeavour to shew that we are not altogether unworthy of the eminent blessings, respecting religion and government, which God has bestowed on us; by putting forth, when needful, some vigorous

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vigorous exertions in the defence of them. And happy shall we be, if by our repentance and prayers, begun with renewed ardour this day, and regularly cultivated in after life, we can engage Almighty God to stand by us, and to render our exertions successful.

Now blessed be God's glorious name, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen.

T H E   E N D.

